

[ARC Home](#) > [News and Resources](#) > [News archive:](#)

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) & Wildlife

The protection of wildlife, and especially species seen as endangered, is a core activity affecting ARC and our partners around the world. One of the biggest driving forces behind illegal poaching is the demand for body parts such as rhino horn and tiger penis to supply the black market in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Although such a trade is outlawed, according to TCM practitioners these commodities have powerful medical properties and their rarity means they come at a very high price, making them highly profitable to poachers and traders alike.

But the principles underlying TCM come from the same tradition as Daoism and are rooted in the need to always bring about balance and harmony in the universe. This means that any ingredient obtained by threatening the existence of a species of plant or animal will be ineffective as a curative medicine. This important fact has been endorsed by the leading Daoist scholars in China while at the same time they are identifying alternative (sustainable) herbal remedies that can be used instead.

ARC has been working in partnership with the Chinese Daoist Association who are promoting this vitally important message by speaking in public forums, writing articles and teaching. This challenge to the demand for body parts is part of a global strategy, with ARC's partners in countries like Indonesia, Kenya and other sub-Saharan African nations committing themselves to raising awareness in communities where the animals are being poached. With committed faith groups from Christian and Muslim communities joining the Daoists in challenging both supply and demand it is hoped that the needless slaughter of these beautiful and iconic species can be brought to a halt.

Daoism and Wildlife Conservation

ARC is working work with the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA), the umbrella organisation for all Daoists in China. Daoism is the philosophical, cultural, religious and physiological basis of TCM, but during the 20th century TCM was mostly separated from its traditional Daoist roots. This project supports the Daoists efforts to change the mindset that underpins the use of endangered species in TCM by attacking the problem at its core and emphasising that the spiritual roots of TCM involves harmony in nature and respect for all living beings.

The Daoist community has a large network of TCM practitioners, producers and consumers, many of whom practice at Daoist temples, and TCM texts are primarily found in the medicinal texts that form one quarter of the 1,440 books of the Daoist Canon. Among Daoism's basic principles is the importance of maintaining a balance between nature and humanity. The human body is a microcosm of the universe and TCM is essentially about retuning the yin and yang of the body to be in harmony

with the yin and yang of the universe. The revolutionary yet spiritually and philosophically consistent teaching of the Daoists is that one's yin and yang cannot be rebalanced if in trying to do so you disturb the balance of nature and the universe: paradoxically, in fact, such a mistaken approach could well make you more ill.

Awareness campaign

To advance this message ARC is supporting an awareness campaign with the Daoist Community to reduce the production and market demand for any Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) products using threatened animal and plant species and, instead, promote the use of sustainable wild plants and alternatives.

Importantly, ARC's traditional medicines programme with the Daoist community, and the Chinese Academy of Science, is not just about tackling the illegal wildlife trade but also looks to the restoration of local traditional medicines. This approach will be reviving, through local Daoist temples and networks, the traditions of *dong tian* and *fu di* sacred natural and medicinal sites with their sustainable production of herbal medicines, local democracy and concomitant environmental protection in China.

The tradition in China is that each locale has its own versions of core TCM prescriptions based upon locally available resources of primarily flora. Thus while TCM at the commercial level in China is now increasingly a medicine for the middle class, Daoist traditional TCM is the medicine of the poor. The revival of these local *dong tian* and *fu di* would enable the Daoists to provide these sustainable medicines at a locally affordable price and thus help reduce the demand for products using illegal wildlife trade items. Tackling the root causes of the illegal wildlife trade by the development and marketing of affordable and sustainable TCM based on local products is a vital part of the wildlife protection strategy.

Reinforcing wildlife protection

In 2018, the China Daoism Association drafted a seven-year plan for environmental protection. It included the following statement on wildlife.

Wildlife

1. Chinese medicine shall not use endangered animal parts which are forbidden by the government. Daoists should advocate the use of herbs as much as possible and avoid as much as possible the use of animal parts for medicine. Daoist medicines and diet prohibit the use of endangered animals such as pangolin, which are protected by the Wildlife Law and listed as an endangered rare species. The Daoist community encourages temples to train Daoist doctors and believers on the laws and policies concerning the protection of wildlife in the country, as well as traditional Daoist values and raise public awareness and resist the illegal wildlife trade.

Do not buy or sell rhino horns and do not use rhino products. In 1993, the Chinese government banned the trade, possession and use of rhino horns. Daoism advocates simplicity and compassion towards all life. The use of rhino horns either as a status symbol or as a medicinal ingredient, is not only against the Chinese law, but also against Daoist teachings. Daoism calls on all followers not to use or buy rhino horns.

2. Do not buy or sell ivory and do not use ivory products. On January 1, 2018, the Chinese government banned all trade in ivory products. The Daoist community

calls on believers to abide by state laws and follow traditional Daoist teachings and to avoid buying ivory products, avoid using ivory products, and resolutely resist ivory smuggling and other forms of illegal ivory trade.

3. The Daoist community has called on believers to be rational and scientific when they conduct mercy release. Harmful mercy release will not only result in the death of the released animals themselves, but will also encourage the proliferation of the illegal wildlife trade. It may also lead to invasive species damaging the local ecology. Daoists should encourage believers to avoid mercy release when uncertain of the ecological consequences or replace mercy release with other forms of charity. Where possible, in cooperation with the local forestry and environment departments, Daoist temples can provide guidance and training to believers who carry out mercy release, and reduce the negative impact of mercy release on environment.